

Ministry of Grace Church

Exodus 17 – Speaker Notes

As we've been going through the book of Exodus, we've seen many parallels between the Christian experience and the travels and testing of the Children of Israel. The saving of the firstborn of Israel from the death angel during the Passover is a clear parallel to our own salvation. It was the sacrifice of the Paschal lamb and the blood that was applied to the doorways of the children of Israel that saved them from death, just as it was the sacrificial death of the Lamb of God and the shedding of His blood, applied by faith to our hearts that saved us from spiritual death.

Once the firstborn of all of Israel had been rescued from death, *Yahweh* declared that all the firstborn belonged to Him. He even declared that the firstborn of the animals were His and they had to be redeemed if they were to be kept alive. In a similar manner, we were redeemed by God when we were saved. He purchased us with the blood of Christ, and we are now His property.

Throughout their travels from the time that they left their encampment at Succoth, *Yahweh* led the children of Israel with the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. This is a beautiful picture of how God leads His children with the Holy Spirit throughout our journeys on this earth. Even when it looked like *Yahweh* had led them into a trap at Pi-Hahiroth, the Israelites discovered that *Yahweh* was actually providing them a way of escape while defeating those who had enslaved them. Once again, we see a picture of the Christian life in which God, through the Holy Spirit frees us from the slavery of sin.

The Israelites had come to the Wilderness of Sin and had complained that they had nothing to eat. After Moses prayed to *Yahweh*, He provided manna for the people six days a week. On the sixth day He provided twice as much manna so they would not have to gather any on the Sabbath. Likewise, as we humble ourselves and pray to God, He provides for all our needs.

As we now continue with chapter 17 of the book of Exodus, we see the children of Israel leaving the Wilderness of Sin and marching up to Rephidim where *Yahweh* will also provide them with water to drink.

Exodus 17:1

All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink.

The children of Israel most likely spent more than a week in the Wilderness of Sin because of the lesson they needed to learn regarding the manna only being provided for six days (not on the seventh). Exactly how long they camped there, we don't know. From this wilderness location they moved to Rephidim. According to the book of Numbers, however, there were two intermediate stops, probably representing a day's journey each:

And they set out from the wilderness of Sin and camped at Dophkah. And they set out from Dophkah and camped at Alush. And they set out from Alush and camped at Rephidim, where there was no water for the people to drink. (Numbers 33:12-14)

Up to this point, the Israelites had been travelling across open spaces. This part of the journey, however, was through canyons up into the mountainous region surrounding Mt. Sinai. They were walking uphill for the entire trip from the Wilderness of Sin to Rephidim.

Even though the children of Israel were obediently following *Yahweh's* leading (the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night), they arrived at Rephidim and had no water to drink. Let us take a lesson from this: even though we are following God's leading, He may at times lead us into situations where it appears that He has deserted us. Be assured, He has not! During those times of need, we have only to humble ourselves and seek His help in prayer.

Exodus 17:2-3

Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?"

Once again, we see that the children of Israel had not learned that the source of their sustenance and protection was *Yahweh*. Instead, they went to Moses and argued with him. Lest we lose sight of their predicament, remember that they have just traversed three days through barren, dusty, dry country. This travel of the few days entailed a constant increase in elevation. They may have had the ability to carry water with them, but it's unlikely that it would have lasted them more than about a day or two. During this hike they would have gotten progressively more thirsty as they trudged forward, following the pillar of cloud. Upon reaching Rephidim and having set-up camp, they would have been in dire need of water, so they demanded that Moses give them water to drink.

Notice the attitude of the children of Israel. They were thirsty and in need of water. However, instead of simply stating their need, they made a demand. They felt entitled to having water and blamed their leader for not having supplied it. Is this how we approach God? When we have needs do we go to God in prayer and demand the solution? Or do we approach our Master and lay at His feet the need that we perceive we have, letting Him identify and provide the solution?

Once again, we see that the Israelites were focused on their fleshly needs and accused Moses of having intentionally done this to them. This becomes even more astounding when we consider that every morning for more than a week (except on the Sabbath) they have received food from *Yahweh*. If He can provide food, can He not provide water as well? But, instead of focusing on *Yahweh*, they focus on themselves.

Exodus 17:4

So Moses cried to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me."

I want to quote a verse from the book of Numbers that I will be quoting over and over again throughout this study.

Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth.
(Numbers 12:3)

The Hebrew word translated "meek" here means "gentle, lowly, meek, or humble." Remember, Moses spent the first 40 years in the household of Pharaoh's daughter and the next 40 as a shepherd wandering the wilderness. During these 80 years He learned that who Moses is, or is perceived to be, is not important. He had learned that the really important thing is who *Yahweh* is. Moses is

nothing, *Yahweh* is everything. Therefore, when the people complained to Moses, his response to the needs of the people was to go to *Yahweh*, he didn't try to solve the problem himself.

Even though most translations say, "What shall I do with this people" or "What shall I do to this people." A better translation would be, "What shall I do **for** this people." Moses was seeking a solution. He was not complaining to *Yahweh*. He reminded his LORD that, "They are almost ready to stone me" This could also be translated "Yet a little while and they will stone me." Moses was describing the situation to *Yahweh* indicating the desperate need that the people had.



The Rock at Rephidim (at Horeb)

Exodus 17:5-6

And the LORD said to Moses, "Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink." And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel.

Moses was told to take some of the elders of the people as witnesses of what was about to happen. After all, two and a half million people could not all see Moses strike the rock. The rock seems to have been in an out-of-the-way location that would only allow a few of the elders of the people to be present with him. This also may have been a test of faith for the people; would they believe the elders?

Yahweh said, "I will stand before you there on the rock" – The presence of *Yahweh* in the form of the pillar of cloud was going to lead Moses and the elders to a specific location. Compare this to the star which guided the Magi to the house in Bethlehem where the Christ child was. Consider this: **God is always willing to lead us. The question is, are we willing to follow Him?**

The word translated "rock" is a Hebrew word meaning a large boulder or a cliff. Not a little stone or pebble, but a large stone, a massive stone. See the pictures above, believed to be the actual rock of Horeb. The very word "**Horeb**" means "desolate." This is an area where the limestone of the

Wilderness of Sin has given way to the granite of the mountain range containing Mt. Sinai. This rock at Horeb is very near the location of Mt. Sinai as we will see in the ensuing chapters of Exodus.

Moses was told that water would come out of the rock for the people to drink. Though there is a very real physical meaning to this, there is also a vast spiritual meaning regarding this rock from which water flowed. In his first letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul said:

and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. (1Corinthians 10:4)

And, in his conversation with the Samaritan woman, Jesus described Himself as giving the water of life:

“but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” (John 4:14)

Clearly, this rock is a type and picture of the Messiah, the Christ who will give the water of life to all those who ask.

Exodus 17:7

And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”

Moses called the place *Massah*, which means “a testing,” not because *Yahweh* was testing the children of Israel, but because this was where the people tested whether God was really with them or not. He also called it *Meribah*, which means “a quarreling” or “contention” because of the quarreling of the Israelites.

Notice that Moses perceived this not as *Yahweh* testing the faith of the children of Israel, but of them testing *Yahweh* to prove whether or not He was really with them. This seems ludicrous in light of the fact that since before the crossing of the Sea, *Yahweh* had been present in the pillar of cloud and for more than a week *Yahweh* had been providing them with manna for their daily sustenance. And - at least twice before, He had led them to a source of water that fed all the people and their animals. How quickly these people forgot the divine origin of their salvation and daily sustenance. It’s time to ask ourselves if we ever forget the divine origin of our salvation and our daily sustenance.

This reminds me of a New Testament passage that we looked at last week. After Jesus had taught the crowds, he and the disciples got into a boat and headed across the Sea of Galilee. While they were in the middle of the sea, a violent storm broke out and the waves were so violent that the boat was filling up with water, but Jesus had fallen asleep. Do you remember what they said after they awakened Him? They didn’t say, “Master, save us!” They said, “Teacher, don’t you care that we are perishing?”

Exodus 17:8

Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim.

There is some disagreement as to who is referred to as Amalek. Since the attack came from the rear, the attack was from the southwest, the direction of the Wilderness of Sin. We’re reminded of this attack in Deuteronomy.

Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you came out of Egypt, how he attacked you on the way when you were faint and weary, and cut off your tail, those who were lagging behind you, and he did not fear God. (Deuteronomy 25:17-18)

This is the opposite direction from where the Amalekites are seen to reside later on (see 1Samuel chapter 15). The Prophet Samuel, in his instructions to Saul to utterly annihilate the Amalekites, makes it clear that this is the same Amalek that attacked the Israelites during the Exodus:

Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘I have noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt. (1Samuel 15:2)

According to Genesis chapter 36, however, Amalek was a grandson of Esau, Jacob’s brother. But, according to Genesis chapter 14, there were people known as Amalekites residing in the Sinai Peninsula at the time before Esau’s father, Isaac was born:

In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him came and defeated the Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emim in Shaveh-kiriathaim, and the Horites in their hill country of Seir as far as El-paran on the border of the wilderness. **Then they turned back and came to En-mishpat (that is, Kadesh) and defeated all the country of the Amalekites,** and also the Amorites who were dwelling in Hazazon-tamar. (Genesis 14:5-7)

So, although there is no definitive evidence for or against these being the descents of Esau, it seems more reasonable to believe that they were not.

Exodus 17:9

So Moses said to Joshua, “Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.”

This is our first introduction to Joshua who is later referred to as the assistant of Moses (see Numbers 11:28). He is also the one who would later lead the children of Israel into the Promised Land where they would defeat all the inhabitants of the land (see Joshua 1:1, 2).

We also know that Joshua was one of the spies sent out to investigate the Promised Land. It is interesting to note that his name originally was Hoshea (meaning “deliverance” or “salvation”), but Moses gave him the name Joshua (meaning “Jehovah saves” – The Greek equivalent of this is Jeshua, the English equivalent is Jesus):

These were the names of the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land. And Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun Joshua. (Numbers 13:16)

At the crossing of the Red Sea, the children of Israel did not have to fight. They only had to believe and obey. The result of their faith was that God fought their enemies for them. Now they have just demonstrated their lack of faith (see their question in verse seven; "Is the LORD among us or not?") And instead of God fighting their enemies for them, the Israelites had to fight themselves.

Exodus 17:10–13

So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands grew weary, so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side. So his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. And Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the sword.

Wait a minute! Who was this Hur fellow? He seems to have just come out of nowhere. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, he was the husband of Miriam, Moses' and Aaron's sister.

Notice that the Amalekites attacked from the rear and picked-off the stragglers and the weakened ones of Israel. That seems to be the way that our enemy likes to attack us when we are spiritually weak and not close to God. Notice also, that Moses gives the people a symbol of God's divine power and holds it high for all to see. When his arms get weary, he lowers the symbol of God's power so the soldiers can no longer see it. Without the strength of the visible symbol, their faith grows weak, and they are disheartened in battle. When the symbol is once again raised, they are emboldened in their faith, and they prevail in battle.

In our battle with Satan and the world system, we are victorious only when we see God's power in our mind's eye through faith. When we try to battle Satan in our own strength we fail, but when we do it in faith, the power of God prevails over our enemy.

The problem with symbols such as this is that we begin to equate the redemptive and protective power with the symbol rather than with the God of the symbol. This may be why God told the Israelites not to make any carved image of Him.

Let's stop and consider for a moment, the importance of the ministry of Aaron and Hur. Neither of them was the leader. It was not their own hands raising the rod that caused the Israelites to prevail. They were "behind the scenes" helpers. All they did was hold up Moses' arms. So how is this a ministry? Without their faithful, invisible ministry, the cause would have failed, and the army of the Israelites would have been defeated. Frequently, the ministry of those behind the scenes is a very important part of God's work, like the nursery workers in a church.

Exodus 17:14

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven."

This is the first time that Moses is commanded to write an account of what happened. It may be the impetus for the writing of the first five books of the Bible by Moses. Moses was instructed to recount for Joshua the events of the day and how the holding up of the symbol was important in God's victory.

Exodus 17:15-16

And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The LORD Is My Banner, saying, "A hand upon the throne of the LORD! The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."

We see here Moses' response to God's victory. Just as Abram built an altar in recognition of the presence and preeminence of God, so Moses built an altar and on it declared that Jehovah is the banner (the symbol) for Moses. The Hebrew word translated "Banner" is *nissi*, meaning "a flag or a sail," that is "a token or a symbol." Moses made a declaration that it was not the staff, which was only the symbol, but God Himself, who is the one we are to look to in times of our battles.

So What?

Contention or Submission

When we encounter difficulties traversing the road of life what do we do? Do we go to God and complain that the road is rocky and dry? Do we complain that there is no water like he promised there would be? Or do we go to Him and present our need, in faith believing that He will provide. Or – do we ignore Him and just hope everything will turn out OK? Or – perhaps we ignore Him and try to fix the problem ourselves. Here's what Paul told the believers at Philippi?

do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

Let your requests be made known to God and He will give you peace! How could the children of Israel have been so faithless when they had seen *Yahweh* part the Red Sea and they were daily gathering the manna which He provided? Could it be that they explained away the miracles as natural phenomena, not really believing *Yahweh* to be a God of miracles? Perhaps they were so focused on the here and now, the physical world, the world of dust and thirst, the world of stress and pressures, the world of jobs and children and bills to pay, that they forgot that they lived in a spiritual realm where an enemy is trying to defeat them. Perhaps they forgot that an all-powerful God was there to save them and provide for them. Does that describe our walk with God? Do we often forget that this world is not our home; we're just a passin' through?

The Israelites were following God's leading in the form of the pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. They knew, without a doubt, which way God was leading them. And yet, they still would not take their eyes off of themselves and the world around them. We, on the other hand, are commanded to walk by faith, not by sight. We are to traverse the road of life listening to the still, small voice of God. When we run into difficulties it most often is because we've stopped listening to our Guide and we've taken a path that He didn't lead us down. Sometimes, however, even when we are following Him closely, we encounter difficult circumstances. We become thirsty and have no water to drink. We have a need with no means of providing for it. That's when we need to present our needs before Him. That's when we need to remember,

do not be anxious about **anything**, but in **everything** by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (Philippians 4:6)

Notice that the children of Israel were more concerned with their physical needs than their spiritual needs. They had not yet learned that in spite of the physical world we live in, the most important part of this life is the spiritual part.

Moses knew that, and He went to the source of comfort and protection. He laid the need before *Yahweh* and He provided for them in a miraculous manner. But having drunk the water that God provided, the children of Israel looked up only to see the enemy attacking from the rear!

Attack on the Heels of Victory

It's amazing how often we encounter attacks from our enemy immediately after a spiritual victory. From Moses' perspective, receiving water from the rock was an answer to prayer in meeting the needs of the people. But no sooner had the water appeared than the enemy attacked. Notice that it was not a frontal attack, but an attack from the rear, on the stragglers, on the weakened part of the body. We see a similar situation with Elijah. We read in 1 Kings chapter 18 that Elijah defeated the prophets of Baal.

That should have produced courage and faith in the heart of Elijah, having had such a tremendous spiritual victory over the enemies of *Yahweh*; having seen the people of Israel turn once again to *Yahweh* from the false religion of idol worship. Instead, when his life was immediately threatened by Jezebel, he fled. And - he continued to flee from Jezebel (and from the presence of God) until he came to this same spot where *Yahweh* brought water from the rock, Mt. Horeb. But God confronted Elijah there, asking him why he was there. After all, this was not the path that God had directed Elijah to take. Elijah went there at his own direction. Sure, Elijah was zealous for the LORD, but he was doing it in his own strength and in his own way. He had taken his own path.

There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." (1Kings 19:9, 10)

Nonetheless, God met him on the path that he had taken. God had not left him nor forsaken him. But Elijah had to listen carefully in order to hear God's direction:

And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind, an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake, a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. (1Kings 19:11-12)

Elijah had to seek God and listen intently to what He had to say and then return to Samaria believing that God would protect him. Likewise, Moses had to listen to the voice of God and send Joshua out with an army of the Israelites who had never fought their own battles. Moses, Joshua, and Elijah all had to act in faith in order for God to deliver them.

Our Christian walk is no different. When we see God's great spiritual victories in our lives the enemy is ready to attack. And taking our eyes off our Guide, we perceive the threat and immediately forget that God is there to protect us. We need to drop to our knees and commit ourselves once again into His loving hands. We need to resist the attacks of our enemy, but we need to do it through humble submission to God. We need to move closer to God, to listen to the words of His low whisper.

"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. (James 4:6b-8a)

Where are we today? Are the cares of life closing in around us? Does life seem to be a struggle? We know what we need to do! Are we cowering in fear? Are we suffering sleepless nights haunted by worry? Or are we standing on the hilltop with our hands raised high, giving God the glory for all that is happening to us! That's where we all need to be.

Let's pray.